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Neither this, nor that

Elise Hochhalter
University of Iowa

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NEITHER THIS, NOR THAT

by

Elise Hochhalter

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Master of Fine Arts
degree in Book Arts in the
Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

May 2018

Thesis Supervisor: Associate Professor of Practice Sara Langworthy

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Graduate College
The University of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTER'S THESIS

This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

Elise Hochhalter

has been approved by the Examining Committee for
the thesis requirement for the Master of Fine Arts degree
in Book Arts at the 2018 graduation.

Thesis Committee:

Sara Langworthy, Thesis Supervisor

Timothy Barrett, Thesis Supervisor

Emily Martin

Julia Leonard

Giselle Simón

To Loretta

&

To Hans

Everyone has experienced that he has been in doubt whether he has actually experienced something with his senses or has simply dreamt about it. Probably the ability to discriminate between these alternatives first comes about as the result of an activity of the mind creating order.

Albert Einstein
“Relativity and the Problem of Space”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have had so many opportunities during my time in Iowa. I was a working papermaker alongside Tim Barrett at the Oakdale Papermaking Research Facility. I was bench trained in bookbinding and conservation by Gary Frost and Giselle Simón. Iowa taught me that I could indeed survive below zero temperatures, and it taught me the modest beauty of a cornfield in all seasons.

My most sincere gratitude to my MFA committee, Sara Langworthy, Tim Barrett, Julie Leonard, Emily Martin, & Giselle Simón, for their willingness to tackle anything and everything from the profound to the mundane. Thank you to all of the artists I have had the privilege to know and work alongside, those that have graduated and those that remain. Thank you especially to Lisa Miles, Sarah Luko, and Catherine Liu, all three a source of deep inspiration and support. Thank you to my Gary Frost, Melissa Moreton, Tatiana Ginsberg, Sara Sauers, Karen Carcia, Kazumi Wilds, Radha Pandey, & Candida Pagan. Thank you to my family, my yoga family, my friends, and most of all, Sailor. I hope he knows that every day I try to do as much for him as he does without complaint for me.

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

NEITHER THIS, NOR THAT is an artist book that explores the abstract nature and interdependence of personal history, memory, and dreams in an artificial landscape.

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PREFACE

NEITHER THIS, NOR THAT emerges from the collision of several discrete inspirations: a solar eclipse, the historical relationship between bees and dead animals, my own experience bearing witness to death, and the ultimate merging of those memories and related dreams over the course of time.

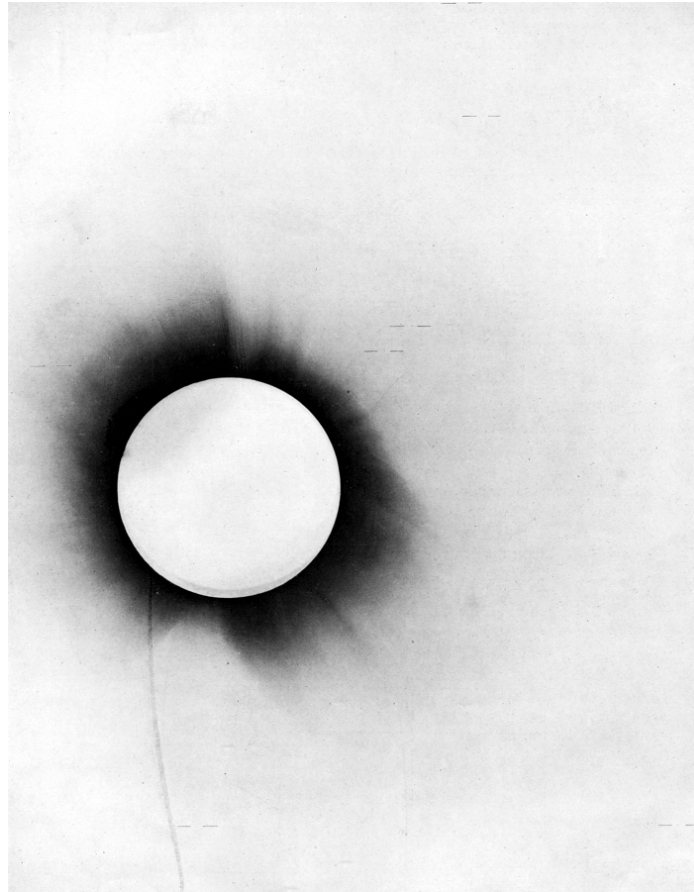


Figure 1. 1919 eclipse negative, Arthur Eddington

An image of totality was captured by the astronomer Arthur Eddington during a solar eclipse on May 29, 1919, taken as part of an experiment designed to test Einstein's theory of general relativity. The scientists aimed to measure the distance between stars in a constellation, with and without the sun in front of them. Witnessing totality proved an

ambiguity, that measurable fields could exist in empty space, and blurred the perceived boundaries of “ponderable matter.”

Natural phenomena such as the solar eclipse have given human beings an avenue to explain the unexplainable for as long as they have been able to recognize the peculiarity of it. We measure the passage of time by cycles of light and darkness. The presence or absence of the sun—day and night—may be one of the most defining and reliable dualities of consciousness. During an eclipse, time is both interrupted and accelerated, and this is recognized by human beings and animals alike. From my grandmother’s house in High Hill, Missouri in mid-August of 2017, the cicadas sang at the artificial dusk and dawn, just before and after totality.

The Ancient Greeks and Romans believed that bees generated spontaneously out of the carcasses of dead animals. Virgil alludes to it in Book IV of *The Georgics*: “How often in the past the putrid blood/ Of slaughtered cattle has engendered bees.” In the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, Aristaeus must bring sacrificial calves to the altar of the gods to restore the health of his bees. Bees are mythically virtuous and altruistic, endlessly repetitive and non-competitive, and there is something undeniably poetic about the space that bees occupy in nature. The virtues observable in the behavior of bees are almost godlike, and though we now know this notion to be false, the idea of spontaneous generation seems to come out of the recognition of an extraordinary capacity within nature to break free from the rigidity of established orders, and the recognition that the animal has a capacity for perfection that human beings do not. Through bees, perhaps the most significant image recurring throughout my work, I wanted to explore the more abstract

concept of the cyclical nature of “death” and “rebirth,” or any sort of transformational experience, paralleled by the eclipse.

The text and imagery in this artist book come directly out of personal experience, memory, and dreams. Memory can be an exercise in the transfiguration of personal history into mythology. Its fickleness offers a way of reconciling the past and is an expression of an attempt by the mind to tolerate history. Dreams reinforce this transfiguration, by allowing the mind to rationalize or sometimes irrationalize, and by releasing experiences from the literal. Of course, personal history is real in the sense that memory records the occurrence of a series of events, but it is also ephemeral, and the act of committing an experience to memory simultaneously erodes its authenticity while enhancing its meaning. It will be forever impossible to access personal history in an unaltered form. The printed text and imagery in this book explore these ideas, and again, this ambiguity is paralleled by the eclipse.

There is no better suited medium than the book to offer the viewer an impression, a vision of relationships between parts, disparate perhaps when considered in isolation, but cohesive in composition. *Neither This, Nor That* is an exploration of an internal space, a landscape, an intangible space made tangible.

NEITHER THIS, NOR THAT

Neither This, Nor That is a limited-edition, letterpress printed artist book. The paper was made by hand from Japanese kozo, and the binding, a variation on stab sewing, was designed especially for the book. I chose to make the paper by hand in order to achieve certain features: a balance between translucency and durability, and a cool natural tone. Each printed and dyed sheet is folded in half to make folios which are then stacked and sewn together, the folds at the fore edge. This binding style allowed me to experiment with composition through the use of both the front and the back of each sheet as a printing surface and with the natural translucency of the paper as a design element.

The content of the 50-page/25-folio book has three distinct layers. The most apparent is the literal: a total solar eclipse. The book visually traces the path of an eclipse, both towards and away from totality. It was important for me to situate the contents of the book alongside this cosmic event because of its power to suspend time, containing representations of time and space that are not necessarily representative of reality. The center folio represents totality, and when the pages are turned from right to left, the shadow of the moon moves from west to east.

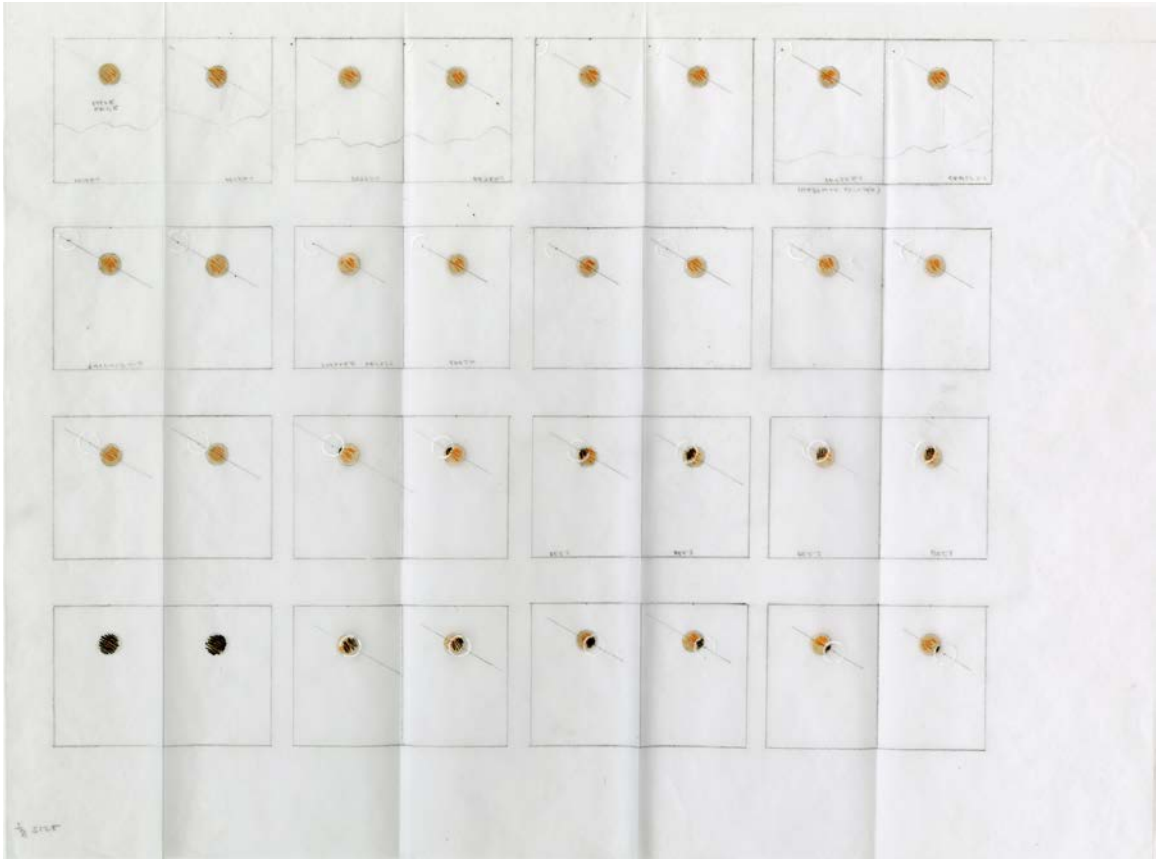


Figure 2. early sketch

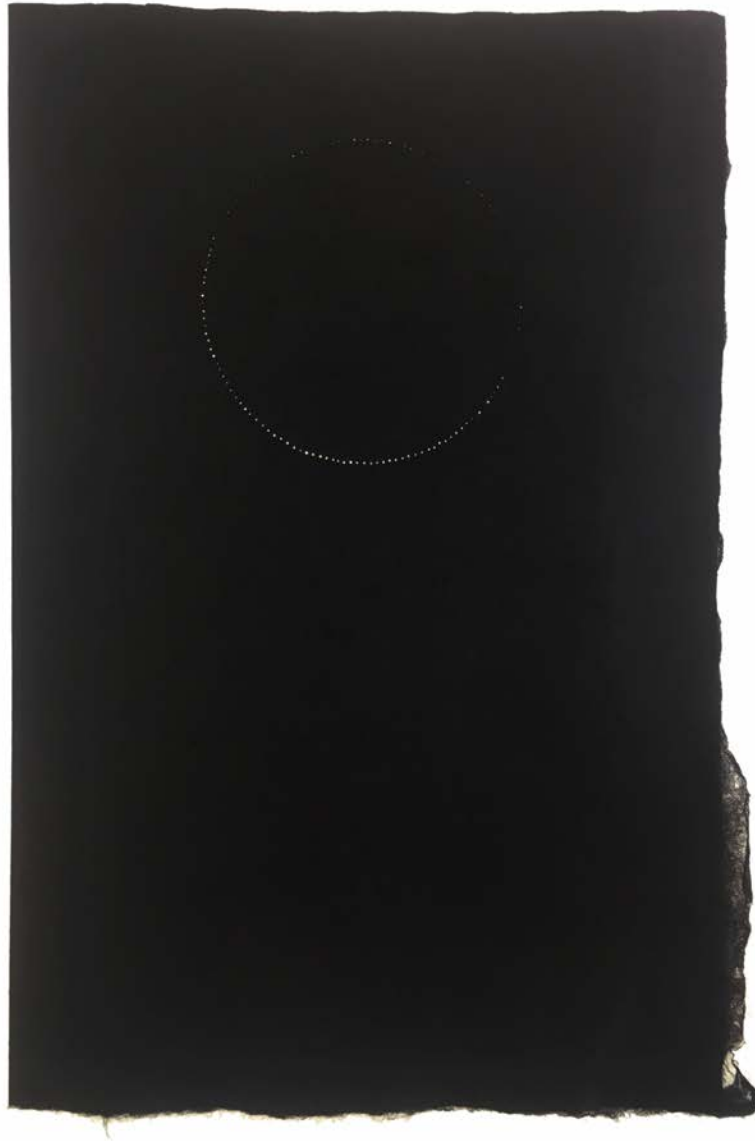


Figure 3. totality folio

The second layer of content is imagery, gathered and rendered from dreams, experiences, and personal symbology, and is created using digital and nondigital photopolymer, and natural dyeing. These images are mirrored throughout the book, as though they are reflected across the center folio that depicts totality. Therefore, as the

reader pages through the book, the images recur, some folios reflecting their corresponding opposite folio rigidly, while some deviate slightly. Below are two corresponding folios on opposite sides of totality. They mirror each other, though they represent one of the deviations. Folio I represents an imagined exploration of the moments after death. In folio Q, the imagery represents a recurring dream that I have had since childhood and serves as an example of the hazy distinctions between what is real and what is imagined. The open palms on both folios are printed on the inside, or the back of the sheet prior to folding. The bee printed blind, and the tooth in black, are printed on the outside of the folio, or the front of the sheet prior to folding.



Figure 4. Neither This, Nor That, folio I composition



Figure 5. Neither This, Nor That, detail of folio I



Figure 6. Neither This, Nor That, folio Q composition



Figure 7. Neither This, Nor That, detail of folio Q

Two wood dyes, logwood and brazilwood mordanted with ferrous sulphate, were used to achieve the effect of a landscape with the color palette of slate to lavender.

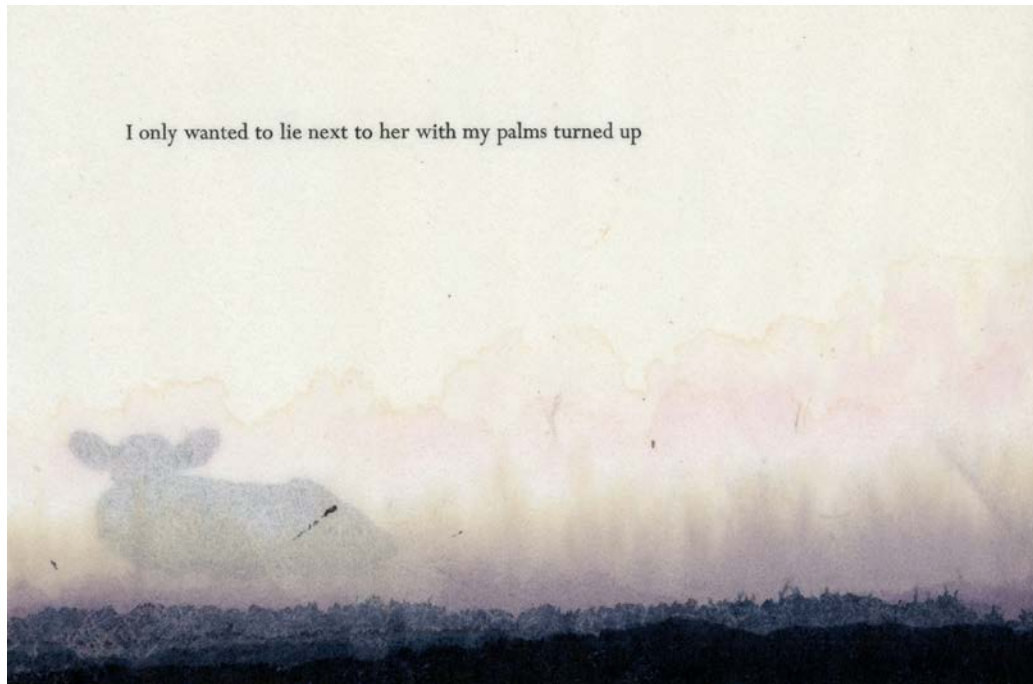


Figure 8. Neither This, Nor That, page detail



Figure 9. Neither This, Nor That, landscape detail

Finally, the text, in the most abstract sense, reflects my own personal grappling with internal and external landscapes, memories and the absence of memories, childhood trauma, the experience of two significant and sudden deaths. It is a sparse aggregation of words culled from a body of automatic writing on these topics that I did over a period of time during the summer of 2017, and is organized loosely, at times directly reflecting the imagery it is paired with and at other times not, and is printed on the inside and the outside of the paper. The images and writing together represent my desire to piece together an impression of an intangible personal space, not necessarily capable of answering any questions or discovering any truths, and contained within the suspended time environment of a book. The text is the only element of the book that does not have a corresponding opposite or mirror.

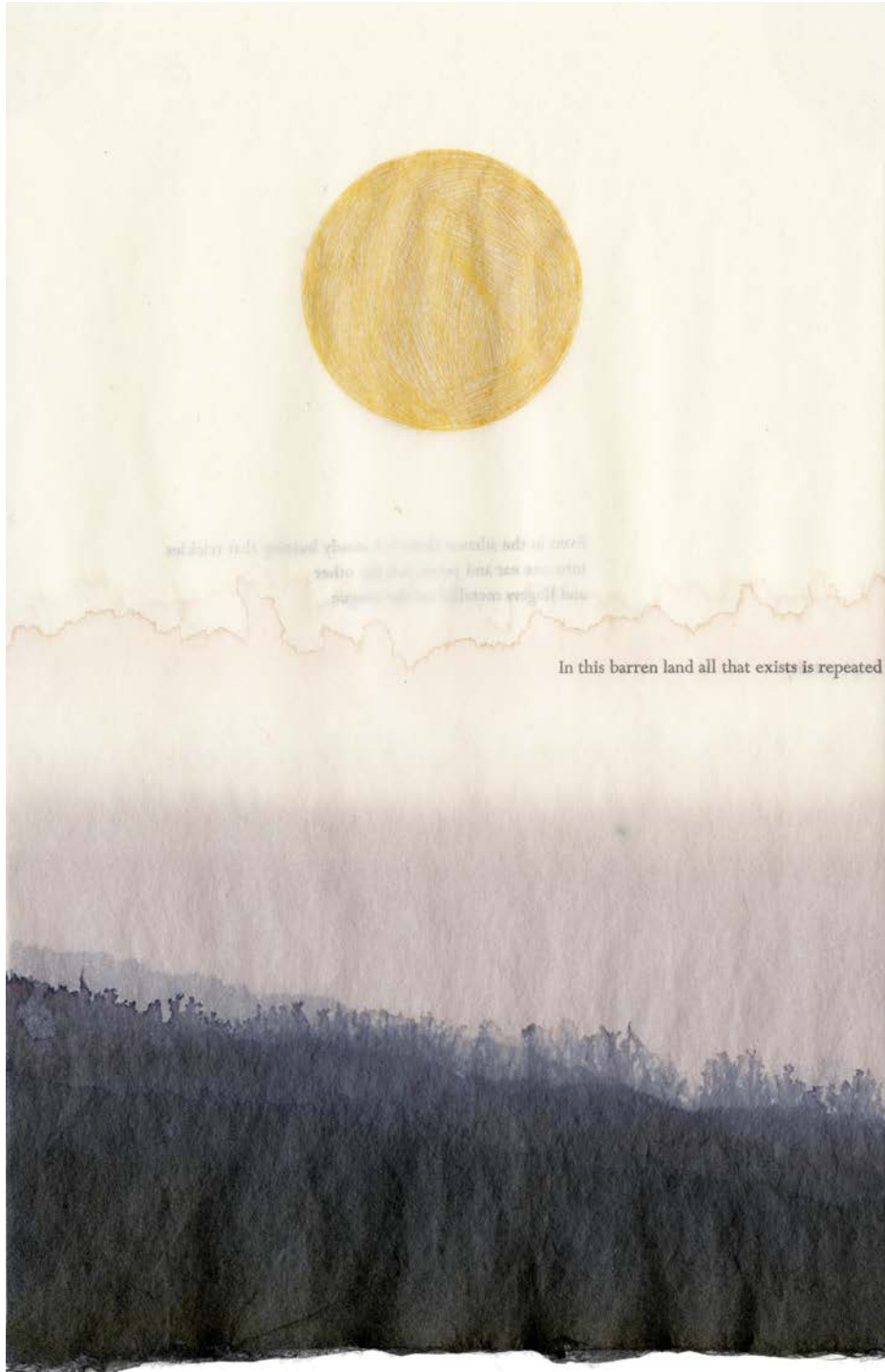


Figure 10. Neither This, Nor That, page detail, folio C

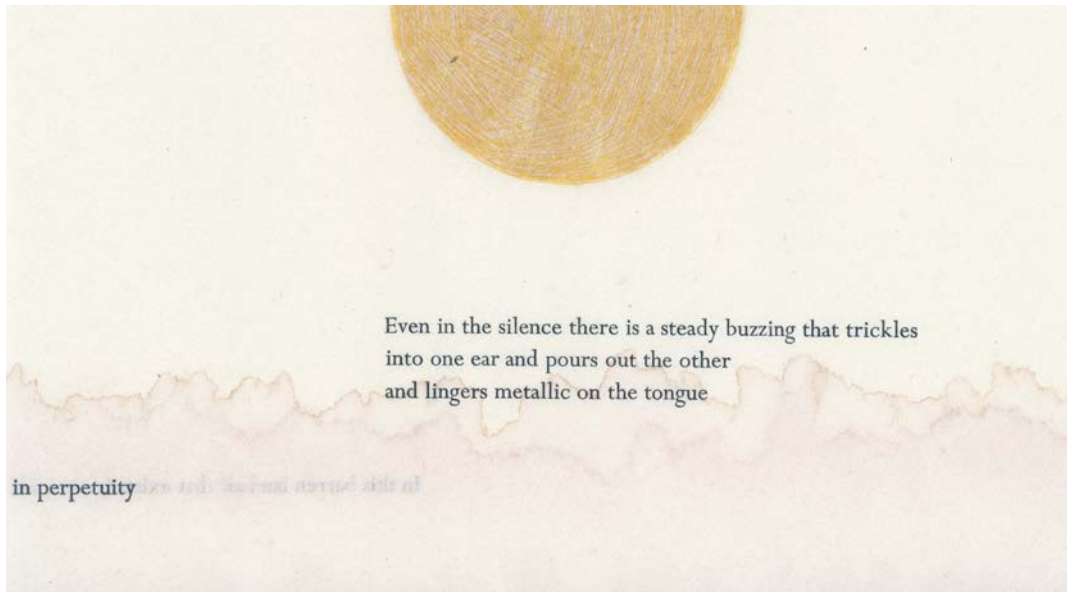


Figure 11. Neither This, Nor That, text detail, folio C



Figure 12. Neither This, Nor That, page detail, folio O

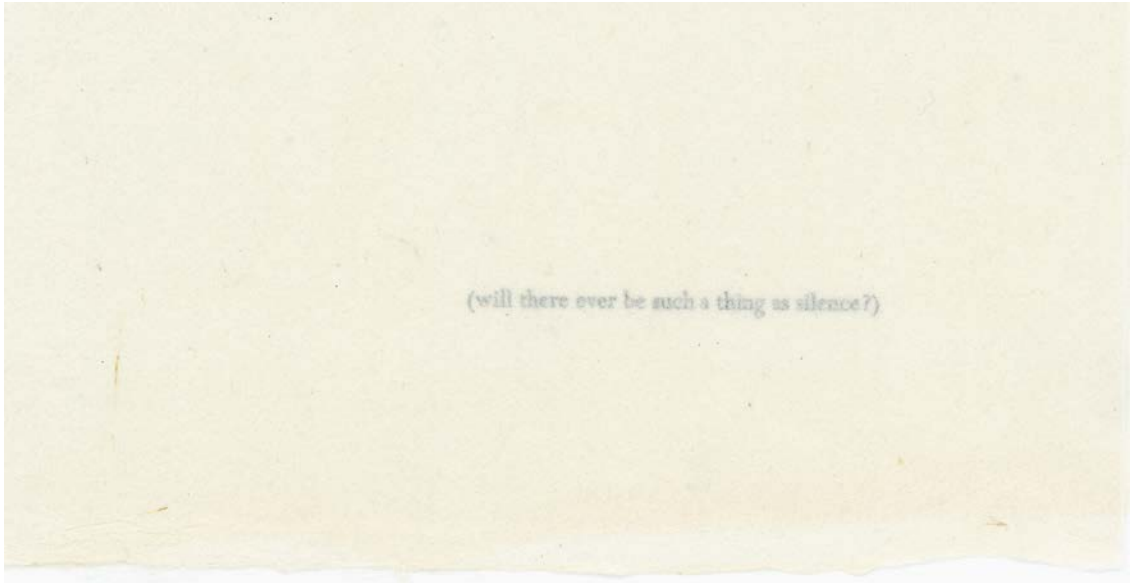


Figure 13. Neither This, Nor That, detail of text printed on the inside of the folio O



Figure 14. Neither This, Nor That, page spread

The desert was always in mind.



Figure 15. The Great Salt Lake Desert landscape